

Gender Slavery

by Kim Syng Hyun

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Sex and Gender

Youtube has quite an active transcommunity. One transfemale vlogger¹ named Sofia discussed the distinction between transgender and transsexuality in one of her vlogs. She said that the distinction can be defined by the mutually different needs of transgender and transsexual people: transsexual people need “freedom *within* the binary gender system” whereas transgender people need “freedom *from* the binary gender system.”²

Sex is commonly believed to be a biological fact of the body whereas gender is a social construct. However, some believe sex is also a social construct similar to gender. Others believe that gender is a biological fact, similar to sex. There are a wide range of approaches to the definitions of gender and sex. I will be using the concepts of Judith Butler, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari who consider both gender and sex to be social constructs.

Deleuze and Guattari considered both gender and sexuality to be social constructs that never fit into the binary gender system of male and female, but “form free multiplicities” and syntheses constituting “local and nonspecific connections”:

...everywhere a microscopic transsexuality, resulting in the woman containing as

¹ Video bloggers and video blogs are referred to as vloggers and vlogs.

² “‘Transsexual vs. Transgender’ – an IMPORTANT distinction,” TrueRedAngel, May 01, 2008. <http://kr.youtube.com/watch?v=Mt8h9QXgIRM>

many men as the man, and the man as many women, all capable of entering – men with women, women with men – into relations of production of desire that overturn the statistical order of the sexes. Making love is not just becoming as one, or even two, but becoming as a hundred thousand. Desiring-machines or the nonhuman sex: not one or even two sexes, but *n* sexes.³

For Deleuze and Guattari, neither sex or gender is a constant state of being, but rather, an ever-changing and non-stop modification of assumed states of being. The assumed state of being is “molar,” centralized around an idea to which nobody can completely conform, whereas the “becoming” is molecular, rhizomatic, creative and decentralized. Nobody can be a woman or a man until they have become subjectified as a molar entity by conforming molecular movements into the model of a molar gender subject:

It is, of course, indispensable for women to conduct a molar politics, with a view of winning back their own organism, their own history, their own subjectivity: ‘we as women...’ makes its appearance as a subject of enunciation. But it is dangerous to confine oneself to such a subject, which does not function without drying up a spring or stopping a flow.⁴

In order to become a sex or gender that’s socially recognized through oral language (a subject), one needs to “stop the flow” of becoming an *autonomous*

³ Deleuze, G. Guattari, F. (1983). *Anti-Oedipus*. University of Minnesota, pp 295-96.

⁴ Deleuze, G. Guattari, F. (1987). *A Thousand Plateaus*. University of Minnesota, pp 276.

gender and transfer movements into a predetermined fantasy of being. “Women don’t build houses...men don’t wear makeup or perfume...women don’t shave their heads...men don’t shave their armpits.” In accordance with such regulative discourse, one feels inclined to monitor and check their molecular movements (small becomings) while restraining and repeating movements of the molar gender subject.

Regardless of whether sex is considered to be a biological fact of the body, both sex and gender constitute molar subjects that never cease to move and change in a molecular (small-scale, decentralized) fashion. Hair on the body is an important factor in determining femininity or masculinity or the sex of a molar subject. People usually go through “puberty” and begin to grow more hair on bodies, but females are expected to shave it whereas males don’t face a hair-related social restriction coinciding with gender.⁵ Similarly, males who have long eyelashes or slender features may consequentially be perceived as feminine.

...the body is figured as a mere *instrument* or *medium* for which a set of cultural meanings are only externally related. But ‘the body’ is itself a construction, as are the myriad ‘bodies’ that constitute the domain of gendered subjects. Bodies cannot be said to have a

⁵That is not to say that males are free from all hair-related social restrictions, especially regarding class, religion, employment, politics, etc.

signifiable existence prior to the mark of their gender...⁶

The question is not, or not only, that of the organism, history, and subject of enunciation that oppose masculine to feminine in the great dualism machines. The question is fundamentally that of the body – the body they *steal* from us in order to fabricate opposable organisms...Stop behaving like that, you're not a little girl anymore, you're not a tomboy, etc. The girl's becoming is stolen first, in order to impose a history, or prehistory, upon her.⁷

Bodies become sexed through adherence to social conceptions regarding gender. According to Butler, gender is constructed through discourse: language, movements, nonverbal communication, behavior, institutional structures, formalized procedures, etc. Sexed bodies can only exist following the construction of a cognitive framework of gender through which biological sex is perceived.

Transgender & Transsexuality

"Transgender refers to those persons who cross-identify or who live as another gender, but who may or may not have undergone hormonal treatments or sex reassignment operations."⁸

Implied by the definition above, Butler's definition of transsexuality could be considered alteration of the body until it physically functions in accordance with

⁶Butler, J. (1990). Gender Trouble. Routledge, Chapman & Hall, Inc. pp 8.

⁷Delueze, G. Guattari, F. (1987). A Thousand Plateaus. University of Minnesota, pp 276.

⁸Butler, J. (2004). Undoing Gender. Routledge. pp 6.

what has been socially constructed as the “opposite” sex. In order to transform a body into the opposite sex, one must ingest hormones and undergo surgical operations to create physical body characteristics that have been codified as biologically consistent with the given sex. One transmale vlogger on youtube named “Nick” considers sex change through surgery and hormone ingestion to be the “second puberty.”⁹

Although gender and sex are both social constructions,¹⁰ transgender and transsexuality are sometimes considered to be “birth defects” or “disorders.” In other words, trans phenomena are often considered to be unnatural flaws clashing with a system of natural order and sex/gender harmony. One transsexual vlogger on youtube claimed that many studies show that transsexuals have a brain of the opposite sex and a body of their assigned sex, and that having a sex change is “correcting a birth defect.”¹¹ The vlogger, karmatic1110, said, “we need treatment,” as if being transgendered is a disease.

Many of the vloggers on youtube claimed to have been diagnosed with Gender Identity Disorder(GID) in order to undergo sex change surgical operations

⁹“Transitioning – changes from T.” Nickdamit48. February 16, 2007.
http://kr.youtube.com/watch?v=aKpp_IBCiZM

¹⁰Including the binary sex/gender system as well as transgender, transsexuality and gender queer.

¹¹“RE: *My Take On ‘Transgender’*.” Karmatic1110. August 29, 2008.
<http://kr.youtube.com/watch?v=mkWj-xjwB9k>

and receive legal prescriptions for hormonal treatments. GID is listed in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, which gives transgender or “gender queer” institutionalized recognition as a mental disorder. Consequently, the choice to undergo sex change operations can be considered a “medically conditioned choice” that is “determined by psychological or medical professionals to be necessitated, that is, if it is determined that not undergoing this transition produces distress, maladaptation, and other forms of suffering...”¹²

The GID diagnosis is sometimes considered beneficial by providing an affordable and excusable route to transition, but the overall options are provided with a narrow and limited framework coinciding with the binary gender system. Moreover, the diagnosis is stigmatizing and oppressive since it makes assumptions about a “natural order of binary gender/sex harmony.” In other words, nonconformity to the binary gender system is assumed to be unnatural and flawed. According to Butler, the diagnosis “imposes a model of coherent gendered life that demeans the complex ways in which gendered lives are crafted and lived” and “assumes the language of correction, adaption, and normalization. It seeks to uphold the gender norms of the world as it is currently constituted and tends to pathologize any effort to produce gender in ways that fail to conform to existing

¹²Butler, J. (2004). *Undoing Gender*. Routledge. pp 75-6.

norms..."¹³

Transsexuality and Molar Gender Subjects

The above-mentioned vlogger, "Sofia," claimed that transsexuals seek freedom *within* the conventional binary gender system. However, the binary gender system seems to impose various problems for transsexuals who fail to completely conform to the molar subject of what has been normalized as the "opposite sex."

The transmale vlogger "Nick" said that when he is stressed, his voice becomes higher during which he avoids speaking. Nick also said that his voice is deeper when he wakes up in the morning: "damn...I wish it would stay that way all day."¹⁴ Another transmale vlogger, Travis, expressed disappointment that although he took testosterone for one year, there are still "feminine" characteristics visible in his facial composition.¹⁵ There are numerous vlogs on youtube in which transfemales explain how to develop a "female voice" to those who are struggling with such efforts.¹⁶ In one vlog, a transfemale explains that males' arms drop

¹³Ibid. pp 4, 77.

¹⁴"Transitioning - changes from T." Nickdamit48. February 16, 2007.

http://kr.youtube.com/watch?v=aKpp_IBCiZM

¹⁵"1 Year, BABY!" trav1414. April 03, 2008. <http://kr.youtube.com/watch?v=uvvs-JBk9wlo>

¹⁶"Developing A Female Voice (Be warned: Guy voice ahead!)" karmatic1110. July 18, 2008. http://kr.youtube.com/watch?v=ciWlzpW_X20 "028 male voice and chest" candiFLA. July 27, 2008. <http://kr.youtube.com/watch?v=MLRCg6zm33c> "Re: Female Voice Test (part 1 of 2)" TrueRedAngel. July 05, 2008. <http://kr.youtube.com/watch?v=UcKz9KUuLB0>

straight down when relaxed, whereas females' arms curve off to the side, beginning at the elbow. She claimed that female arms have evolved in order to hold infants more efficiently.¹⁷

These are examples of efforts to conform one's molecular movements and becomings into a regulated and normalized molar subject of gender, an authoritarian version of gender that has been imposed through historically exclusive regulatory discourse. Many of the above-mentioned vloggers are trying to conform to standardized gender norms to which those who have been assigned to the given gender *since birth* aren't able to conform. Whether this normalization phenomena is a result of the pathologization of gender-queer-becomings is difficult to determine, but the relation between GID diagnosis and transsexual efforts toward gender conformity is easier to comprehend.

If one fails to conform to established gender norms, one consequently runs the risk of being stigmatized and alienated, considered deranged, insane, or perverted, and in effect, losing one's identity as a "person." To prevent such oppressive alienation, "identity politics" have vibrantly survived within not only transcommunities, but queer politics as a whole. Identity politics are efforts to

¹⁷"Physical Markers Of Transsexuality" TransgenderSupport. August 27, 2008. http://kr.youtube.com/watch?v=k6gU5b_NBIs

establish a stable identity in order to gain recognition, effectively subjecting the uncategorizable self to transition into a molar social subject. Jamie Heckert writes about the “violence of representation” and how it relates to identity politics:

Representation, in terms of speaking for others, depends upon the violence of defining and controlling others. Violence, then, is necessary to maintaining the conformity of state-forms, including sexual orientation, and the coherence of state apparatuses. The phrase 'policing sexualities' is comprehensible only because we recognise the commonalities of state policing operations and the practices of violence, sometimes symbolic, that punish transgressions of rules regarding sexuality (or behaviours associated with sexuality, especially gender performance); these rules are, of course, not universal but produced within the context of particular practices, which are, in turn, tied to local identities.¹⁸

As long as people feel pressure to conform into an identifiable subject (identifiable by authority, institutions and consequently by society as a whole), then how can authoritarianism, oppression and subjectification be evaded and deconstructed if such evasions carry a significant amount of discomfort along with them? This is a difficult question. Before taking this into consideration, there are ethical issues regarding social identity of molar subjects, privileges and transition

¹⁸“Towards Consenting Relations: Anarchism and Sexuality,” Heckert, J. retrieved from www.infoshop.org/library/Heckert:_Anarchism_and_Sexuality on December 15, 2008.

from one subject to another that must be taken into question.

Gender Subjects and the Ethical Implications of Transition

Since subjects are socially stratified according to sex and gender, males have unearned social privileges that are transmitted through the mere recognition of male identity. Social acceptance of active and empowering behavior, a relatively wider range of not only employment opportunities, but all opportunities to gain positions of power are included but certainly do not comprise the totality of male privilege. Males are socialized into thinking in ways that can be more empowering within the lifestyles of market economies, “representative” democracies and technological proliferation. Females are generally associated with emotion and males with logic or rationality. Such prejudiced associations function to socialize individuals into predetermined identities and molar gender subjects. However, that is not to say that people completely and universally conform to these molar gender subjects, nor that such conformity is even possible.

The wide range of social prejudices and assumptions that are tied to the female subject imply a wide range of experiences of disenfranchisement and oppression which the male subject can never experience, feel or directly understand from a first-hand vantage point. This stratification phenomena contains not only

social privilege and disenfranchisement, but stratification of cognitive frameworks as a result of the coinciding experiences. "Who am I? I'm a woman." The subject of enunciation takes a different form according to an individual's social privileges or disenfranchisements. "Who am I? I'm just a person."

Gender, sex and sexuality are of course not the only subjects of stratification. Class, race, language, education, religion, division of labor, technology, family, politics, citizenship, locality, medical conditions, psychological conditions, etc. are all stratified, codified and assigned social meanings that directly correspond to the experiences one will undergo through established identity (social recognition) as a categorizable molar subject. Due to the distinguishable characteristics of the experiences that individuals endure as subjects, attempting to transition one's social identity from one subject to another has various ethical implications.

The first ethical problem concerns appropriation of experience through altering one's social identity. Appropriation of experience can give an individual new opportunities for *real* experiences after the new identity has been established and such experiences can include beneficial opportunities such as employment, finding shelter, education, etc. for disenfranchised groups who have been comparatively

excluded from such opportunities. However, if a socially privileged individual attempts to assimilate into disenfranchised groups that have historically been burdened with far greater social oppression, would this not endanger movements toward creating a more equitable society that fosters genuinely equal and participatory power relations? The subject of change is the individual, not the inequitable social relations that produce molar subjects with social privileges and disenfranchisements. Therefore, transition from one molar subject to another is nothing more than individualized assimilation into the contemporary state apparatus.

To give a more concrete example of the problem from a practical point of view: is it ethical for an individual socially recognized as a “white” person, with white privileges, to try to identify oneself as a “black” person? The same ethical problems reside within transsexuality. How can an individual who lived with male privilege for twenty or thirty years (although time may be insignificant) change one’s sex and try to identify as a female whose life experiences comparatively contain much more social disenfranchisement and oppression? The problem is especially serious for gender queer or transgender individuals who maintain an identity *within* the binary gender realm. How can one who is socially recognized as a

male subject and therefore carries male privileges, with all life experiences corresponding to such privileges, decide to recreate one's gender and identify as a female? As mentioned earlier, one who is socially recognized as a male subject and thereby receives male privileges has no way of experiencing prejudices, discrimination, social disenfranchisement or oppression experienced by the female subject. Nor could a "white" male have any first-hand understanding of the social oppressions endured by a "black" male or especially a "black" female.

To put the problem more bluntly: social identity is imposed through coercion. Since identities of molar subjects are created by a power apparatus which is not equally participatory or empowering, and which does not allow for universal self-determination and autonomy, there seems to be no way that an individual can reassign their molar identity through transition. Maybe that's why "transmales" and "transfemales" are not commonly referred to through the "female" or "male" subjects of enunciation.

Becoming What?

Authoritarian and oppressive social power relations create our identities as molar subjects which can only exist as "subjects of enunciation" through regulative discourse. Every individual is a product of and a contributor to such power relations.

The recirculation and reproduction of contributions to oppressive power relations is necessary for such power relations to be maintained. "Normal cannot exist without queer (or otherwise deviant)."¹⁹ Rather than allowing our identities to be overcoded and meshed into existing hierarchies, it seems like we need to somehow evade categorizability and tangible identification.

What we term a molar entity is, for example, the woman as defined by her form, endowed with organs and functions and assigned as a subject. Becoming-woman is not imitating this entity or even transforming oneself into it...Bisexuality is no better a concept than the separateness of the sexes. It is as deplorable to miniaturize, internalize the binary machine as it is to exacerbate it; it does not extricate it from us...For everybody/everything is the molar aggregate, but *becoming everybody/everything* is another affair, one that brings into play the cosmos with its molecular components...By process of elimination, one is no longer anything more than an abstract line, or a piece in a puzzle that is itself abstract.²⁰

Deleuze and Guattari also referred to these molecular becomings as a process toward "becoming-imperceptible."²¹ If an individual's perceptibility is dependent on fixed identity as a molar subject, then perceptibility is a product of and contributor to contemporary and hierarchical power relations. The existence of

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Deleuze, G. Guattari, F. (1987). *A Thousand Plateaus*. University of Minnesota, pp 275-76 and 279-80.

²¹Ibid. pp. 279.

the non-subject, the molecular becoming, the ever-changing, uncategorizable, the without stable points of reference or enunciation? Is cognition possible without a framework with stable points of reference and assumptions?

Everything needs to radically change. Sexual, material, emotional, logical, political, economical, everything. All the categories, until categories themselves become imperceptible. Cognitive and perceptual frameworks need to become imperceptible, or needless to be perceived. Perhaps this includes wiping away the expectations for introductions, bodies and conclusions in the anatomy of an academic report?